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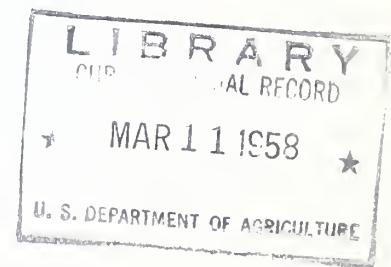
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Marketing Service
Marketing Research Division

HOMEMAKERS APPRAISE FIBERS FOR SELECTED ITEMS
of
HOUSEHOLD FURNISHINGS

Preliminary Summary Report



Agriculture-Washington

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This report deals with homemakers' uses of and preferences for cotton and competing fibers. It is one of a series of studies concerning consumer preferences for farm products conducted by the Market Development Branch. The study was conducted under the direction of Trienah Meyers.

The Agricultural Marketing Service assumed major responsibility for the study, with cooperation and advice from other services in the Department, from the National Cotton Council of America, The Wool Bureau, Inc., The Carpet Institute, Inc., the National Federation of Textiles, and the American Rayon Institute.

The data were collected by Crossley, S-D surveys, Inc., of New York, under contract with the United States Department of Agriculture.

HOMEMAKERS APPRAISE FIBERS FOR SELECTED ITEMS
of
HOUSEHOLD FURNISHINGS

A Preliminary Summary Report

by Daniel B. Levine
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This preliminary report of an extensive study provides some of the major findings relating to homemakers' ownership of and attitudes toward the different fibers used in selected items of household furnishings. The items studied include living room draperies, soft floor coverings in living room and master bedroom, bedspreads, blankets, and table coverings. The survey, for the most part, was limited to items that had been used in the last year. A full detailed report is currently in preparation. Since the present publication is being released before completion of final review and analysis, the data are subject to possible revision.

Results are based on 2,709 interviews completed with homemakers throughout the United States. The sample of persons was selected by area probability techniques to be representative of all private households in the Nation. Field work was conducted during June and July 1957.

The findings are presented as summaries of the statements made by respondents and are subject to any errors in their beliefs and attitudes. Perhaps more importantly, the interpretation of fabrics and mixtures must definitely be considered as that of the respondents. Since no actual inventory was taken, it is possible that in some cases fabrics referred to singly were, in fact, mixtures of several fibers, the predominant one being the only one volunteered. In other cases, the respondent's identification may have been completely in error. In both instances, what the respondent thinks she has must be considered important in that it affects current attitude and future selection. As a further point, the discussion assumes the respondents' full knowledge of relative prices.

Living Room Draperies

A majority--some 64 percent-- of the homemakers in the United States had used draperies in their living rooms within the year preceding the study. Most widely used were cotton (used by about 4 in 10), cotton and rayon mixtures and rayon (each used by 2 in 10), and plastic (1 in 10) (table 1).

Cotton was easily the outstanding fiber preferred for living room draperies. Some 4 homemakers in 10 selected cotton as their choice. Following came fiberglass, rayon, and cotton and rayon mixtures, each mentioned by around 1 in 10 (table 1).

A comparison of fibers owned with those preferred for the next purchase suggests consumers are becoming aware of and, at this time, might be interested in experimenting with the newer synthetic fibers. For example, only 2 percent of the homemakers currently own fiberglass draperies; some 9 percent, however, chose fiberglass as their preferred fiber for the next purchase. Similarly, nylon draperies and Dacron draperies were each preferred by 5 percent but are owned by only 1 percent. These possible shifts appear to be at the expense of rayon and rayon mixtures and plastic draperies (all preferred by about half as many as own them).

A major appeal of cotton, cotton mixtures, and rayon for draperies was durability, the fact that they wear well. Other desirable attributes of cotton were its washability--washes easily, can be laundered at home, and its price--inexpensive and economical. Cotton mixtures as well as rayon, in addition to wearing well, require no linings and hang well; they are the right weight and provide the desired amount of sheerness. Fiberglass was preferred because it washes easily, is easy to care for and, most of all, requires a minimum of or no ironing (table 2).

Rugs and Carpets

Virtually every household in the Nation had some type of hard or soft floor covering in one or more of the rooms. Only 4 percent of the homemakers reported having no floor covering in any room. When asked what types of floor coverings they had --

81 percent had one or more rooms with soft floor covering

15 percent mentioned wall to wall carpeting

57 percent had room size rugs

61 percent had some scatter rugs

51 percent had 1 or more rooms with hard surface coverings

(linoleum, tile, etc.)

In the present study, wall to wall covering is defined as "any rug or carpet fastened to the floor and extending from wall to wall"; room size floor covering is "one that is larger than 4 feet by 6 feet"; and scatter rugs are any rugs which "are 4 by 6 feet or smaller." In all 3 cases, hard surface floor coverings, such as felt base, linoleum, asphalt and other tiles, were excluded and handled as a separate category.

The two rooms on which the study concentrated were the living room and the master bedroom. The types of floor coverings to be found in each of these rooms were as follows:

<u>Type of floor covering</u>	<u>Living room</u>	<u>Master bedroom</u>
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Wall to wall -----	14	4
Room size -----	49	18
Scatter -----	30	44
Hard surface -----	21	30
No floor covering -----	4	10

Living rooms.--The discussion on living room floor coverings was restricted to the principal type of soft floor coverings found in the room. On this basis, about 60 percent of the households have room size rugs as the principal soft floor covering, 17 percent have wall to wall carpeting, and a similar proportion use only scatter rugs in the living room.

Wool is the predominant fiber owned for both the principal wall to wall and room size living room rugs. About 8 homemakers in 10 indicated that their rug or carpeting was made of wool. Approximately 1 in 10 had cotton or cotton mixtures. No other single fiber was mentioned by more than 2 percent (table 3).

The majority of the scatter rugs used as principal living room floor coverings were of cotton. Almost 8 in 10 mentioned this fiber; an additional 5 percent said their scatter rugs were made of cotton mixtures. Following cotton came wool and wool mixtures (owned by 1 in 4). Manmade fibers were owned by less than 5 percent.

The fiber preferred for living room floor covering by those who had either wall to wall or room size carpeting was wool. About two-thirds of the homemakers selected this fiber. As a measure of the feeling toward wool for carpeting, no other fiber was preferred by as many as 1 homemaker in 10. Nylon was selected by around 6 percent and cotton by about 5 percent. Of note is the fact that as many as 10 percent of the homemakers were unable or unwilling to select a preferred fiber, suggesting that perhaps their curiosity has been aroused by the new fibers or forms of fibers now available and that they may be postponing their judgment until they have more information on the use characteristics of these fibers (table 3).

In the case of those homemakers who had only scatter rugs on their living room floors, information was not obtained on fiber preference for the entire group. Instead, this group was asked to indicate the type of floor covering they would be most likely to select. Out of each 10 homemakers having only scatter rugs at present in their living rooms --

- 4 preferred scatter rugs
- 4 indicated that wall to wall was their choice
- 2 favored room size rugs

Those indicating a preference for wall to wall or room size rugs were then asked their fiber preference. They are included in the respective categories shown in table 3.

Wool's popularity was based primarily on its durability--wears well, durable, nap doesn't wear off. Far down the line were such other attributes as "just looks nice," and "easy to clean." In the case of nylon, durability and ease of cleaning were major factors. As contrasted with wool, nylon was also strongly favored because it presented "no moth problem." Cotton's appeals were much the same as nylon's, with two important additions. First, cotton was said to be inexpensive and economical and, secondly, it is washable (table 4).

Master bedroom.--As noted earlier, scatter rugs were the predominant rugs to be found in master bedrooms. For this study, incidentally, the master bedroom was defined as that room occupied by the head of the household. Again, restricting the discussion to the principal type of soft floor covering, about half of the private households in the United States have only scatter rugs in the master bedroom. About 1 in 5 have room size rugs and only 1 in 20 have their bedrooms carpeted wall to wall.

Cotton is the overwhelming leading scatter rug fiber. Out of each 10 households having scatter rugs in the master bedroom, 8 contain rugs made of cotton, slightly less than 2 contain rugs made of wool. The remaining fraction (3 percent) is divided among all other fibers and mixtures (table 5).

As in living rooms, wool leads the parade for both wall to wall and room size rugs in the master bedroom (61 percent and 81 percent, respectively). Of interest, however, is the fact that a higher proportion of the wall to wall carpeting found in master bedrooms was of some fiber other than wool. About 1 homemaker in 4 had wall to wall carpeting made of cotton; 1 in 10 had carpeting made of mixtures of fibers.

Among those who had only scatter rugs in their master bedroom, some 70 percent preferred only scatter rugs. An additional 15 percent indicated their next purchase would be wall to wall carpeting, and 11 percent selected room size as their next choice.

In selecting a preferred fiber for master bedroom carpeting--either wall to wall or room size--a majority chose wool. Cotton was next in order (around 15 percent), followed by nylon. Hard surface floor covering (linoleum rugs) was preferred by about 7 percent; a smaller proportion failed to specify preference. The only noticeable differences in stated preferences between those currently owning or preferring wall to wall and those owning room size rugs was in the proportions selecting nylon. Those owning and preferring wall to wall carpeting were almost 3 times as likely to state a preference for nylon (13 percent as against 5 percent) (table 5).

As to why homemakers preferred the various fibers for bedroom rugs, durability was again the mainstay for wool, followed by the warmth it imparts to the room and floor and by appearance and ease of cleaning. Nylon was also preferred for bedroom rugs because of its durability and ease of cleaning. As in the case of living room rugs, the fact that cotton is inexpensive and economical, as well as being washable, led to its selection as a preferred fiber for master bedroom rugs (table 4).

Bedspreads

Bedspreads were found in use in almost all households in the Nation. Approximately 97 percent of the homemakers reported using 1 or more bedspreads in the year preceding the survey.

Cotton was easily the overwhelming fiber in the bedspread inventory. As many as 98 percent reported having cotton bedspreads. Far down the line came rayon, mentioned by 12 percent and, at the extreme, were cotton and rayon blends, silk, and nylon--all mentioned by 2 percent or less (table 6).

As with ownership, cotton ran away with the top place in the preference contest. Almost 9 homemakers in 10 expressed a preference for cotton bedspreads. Rayon was selected by 3 percent, nylon by 2 percent and silk by 1 percent.

The fact that cotton wears well and washes easily was predominant in cotton's selection as the top preferred fiber. Although preferred by relatively few respondents, both rayon and nylon impressed homemakers with their appearance--they look nice and pretty. Further, rayon is considered dressy or rich and expensive looking. Nylon's other attributes are that it washes easily, dries quickly, and needs little or no ironing (table 7).

Bedcoverings

Most of the homes in the Nation (94 percent) used some regular or electric blankets for bedcovering. Some 93 percent owned regular blankets; about 10 percent had electric blankets.

Information on the fiber content of blankets was restricted to the last blanket acquired. Wool was easily the outstanding regular blanket fiber. Almost half the homemakers indicated that the most recent blanket acquired was made of wool; another 12 percent had wool blends. Cotton and cotton blends accounted for about 30 percent of the total, with the remaining 5 percent distributed among all the other possible fibers and blends (table 8).

The study also included several questions on the type of blanket and fiber that the homemaker would select if she were to buy additional bedcoverings. About 84 percent of those interviewed indicated that they would most likely select a regular blanket; some 15 percent favored an electric blanket.

Of interest is the fact that most of the reasons given for preferring regular blankets dealt with negative reactions toward electric blankets rather than the positive attributes of regular blankets. About 3 homemakers in 10, for example, felt electric blankets "were dangerous," they were "afraid of electricity or the possibilities of fire," they "didn't want to sleep with electricity." Other respondents felt electric blankets were too expensive, or too warm.

On the other hand, those preferring electric blankets gave such positive reasons as, "it has thermostat control, can select the amount of heat wanted; provides an even temperature;" "need less bedding," and "light but warm."

As for fiber preference, wool and wool blends again were the selection of the largest group of homemakers (42 percent and 12 percent, respectively), followed by cotton and cotton blends (15 and 17 percent) and nylon (4 percent) (table 8).

A major appeal of all the fibers was comfort. For wool and wool blends this meant warmth and lightweight; wool also wears well. For cotton and cotton blends, comfort encompassed the above ideas as well as "doesn't scratch or irritate the skin, not sticky and nonallergic." Other homemakers mentioned that cotton washes easily and is less expensive. Nylon's appeal, in addition to its warmth and lightweight, came from its desirable laundering characteristics--"it holds its shape, doesn't shrink or stretch and it washes easily and dries quickly" (table 9).

Table Coverings

Table coverings were found in use in 91 percent of the households in the United States.

82 percent used regular full size table coverings
53 percent used luncheon or bridge cloths
30 percent used place sets or mats

Cotton was the outstanding fiber for both regular size table coverings and luncheon or bridge sets; it was in second place for place mats, following the plastic variety. Approximately 70 percent of the homemakers were using cotton full-size table coverings; an additional 13 percent had table coverings made of cotton mixtures. Linen, owned by 49 percent, came next, then plastic (12 percent) and rayon (7 percent). The order was the same for luncheon and bridge sets; the levels were somewhat different. Cotton was more prevalent among those with luncheon sets; the proportions owning linen or plastic were higher among those with regular full size table coverings. Plastic, cotton, linen and straw or grass fiber; in that order, were the fibers found among owners of place mats (table 10).

Table 1.--Ownership of and preference for living room draperies, by fiber

Fiber	Ownership <u>Percent 1/</u>	Preference <u>Percent</u>
Cotton -----	44	40
Cotton and rayon -----	19	7
Cotton mixtures -----	3	3
Rayon -----	18	9
Rayon mixtures -----	2	1
Plastic -----	11	6
Silk -----	2	1
Fiberglas -----	2	9
Nylon -----	1	5
Linen -----	1	1
Dacron -----	1	5
Other fibers and mixtures -----	1	3
Don't know -----	3	10
Number of cases-----	1,734	1,734

1/ Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple answers.

Table 2.--Major reasons for fiber preference for living room draperies, for selected fibers 1/

Reasons	Cotton <u>Percent 2/</u>	Cotton mixtures <u>Percent 2/</u>	Fiberglas <u>Percent 2/</u>	Rayon and rayon mixtures <u>Percent 2/</u>
Durable, wears well -----	35	31	--	28
Washable, no dry cleaning required -----	19	11	--	--
Inexpensive, economical -----	15	--	--	10
Drapes, hangs well, no lining needed -----	14	25	--	23
Colorfast, fade proof -----	14	14	--	13
Easily washed, easy to clean -----	14	--	19	--
Can be laundered at home -----	13	--	--	--
Looks nice, pretty -----	11	20	15	17
Right weight and sheerness -----	11	20	12	18
Washes well, looks well after laundering -----	11	--	--	--
Easy to care for -----	10	--	20	--
Holds shape, doesn't stretch -----	--	12	--	--
Requires a minimum or no ironing; wash and drip dry -----	--	--	50	--
Soil resistant -----	--	--	14	12
Number preferring the fibers-----	689	162	161	164

1/ Reasons shown are those mentioned by 10 percent or more of the homemakers preferring the indicated fiber.

2/ Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple answers.

Table 3.--Ownership of and preference for principal living room soft floor covering, by type of rug and fiber

Fiber	Ownership			Preference	
	Wall to wall	Room size	Scatter	Wall to wall	Room size
	Percent	Percent	Percent 1/	Percent	Percent
Wool-----	82	83	25	61	66
Wool mixtures-----	3	3	1	4	4
Cotton -----	6	7	77	5	4
Cotton mixtures-----	3	4	5	4	3
Straw, hemp, sisal-----	--	1	2/	2/	2/
Rayon-----	2	1	1	2	1
Nylon-----	2	3/ *	3	9	6
Hard surface-----	--	--	--	2	1
Other fibers-----	*	*	1	1	2
Other mixtures-----	2	*	1	3	2
Fiber unspecified-----	*	1	*	9	11
Number of owners-----	376	1,322	368	511	1,395

1/ Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple answers.

2/ In the case of scatter rug ownership and preference for wall to wall and room size rugs, straw, hemp, and sisal are included in "other fibers."

3/ Asterisk denotes less than 1 percent.

Table 4.--Major reasons for fiber preference for living room and master bedroom soft floor coverings, for selected fibers 1/

Reasons	Living room			Master bedroom		
	Wool	Nylon	Cotton	Wool	Nylon	Cotton
	Per- cent 2/					
Durable, wears well-----	72	50	32	63	45	18
Looks nice, pretty-----	13	10	12	15	--	12
Easy to clean-----	12	42	30	13	32	15
Performance-----	11	--	--	--	12	--
Satisfactory past experience-----	10	--	--	--	--	--
Moth proof; no moth problem-----	--	20	18	--	14	--
Soil resistant, stays clean longer-----	--	15	10	--	12	--
Easy to care for-----	--	13	--	--	--	--
Washable, no dry cleaning required -----	--	10	20	--	--	27
Inexpensive, economical-----	--	--	30	--	--	28
Gives warmth, makes floor warmer-----	--	--	--	16	--	--
Number preferring the fiber 3/-----	1,230	125	91	481	66	137

1/ Reasons shown are those mentioned by 10 percent or more of the homemakers preferring the indicated fiber.

2/ Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple reasons.

3/ Includes those homemakers owning scatter rugs only who preferred either wall to wall or room size rugs.

Table 5.--Ownership of and preference for principal master bedroom soft floor coverings by type of rug and fiber

Fiber	Ownership			Preference	
	Wall to wall	Room size	Scatter	Wall to wall	Room size
	Percent	Percent	Percent 1/	Percent	Percent
Wool -----	61	81	17	51	55
Wool mixtures -----	2/	2/	1	2	3
Cotton -----	24	9	80	13	16
Cotton mixtures -----	2/	2/	3	1	3
Rayon -----	--	3/	2	1	4/ *
Nylon -----	--	3/	1	13	5
Hard surface -----	--	--	--	8	6
Other fibers -----	--	3	1	2	3
Other mixtures -----	13	6	*	3	1
Fiber unspecified -----	2	1	--	6	8
Number of owners -----	112	487	1,117	285	609

1/ Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple answers.

2/ Included in "other mixtures."

3/ Included in "other fibers."

4/ Asterisk denotes less than 1 percent

Table 6.--Ownership of and preference for bedspreads, by fiber

Fiber	Ownership		Preference	
	Percent	1/	Percent	Percent
Cotton-----	98		88	
Cotton and rayon-----	2		2/	*
Rayon-----	12		3	
Silk-----	2		1	
Nylon-----	1		2	
Other fibers-----	1		1	
Other mixtures-----	1		1	
Fiber unspecified-----	2		4	
Number of owners-----	2,634		2,634	

1/ Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple answers.

2/ Asterisk denotes less than 1 percent.

Table 7.--Major reasons for fiber preference for bedspreads, for selected fibers 1/

Reasons	Cotton <u>Percent 2/</u>	Rayon <u>Percent</u>	Nylon <u>Percent 2/</u>
Durable, wears well-----	32	12	20
Easily washed, easy to clean -----	29	--	30
Washes well, looks like new-----	17	--	--
Looks nice, pretty-----	14	36	30
Washable, no dry cleaning required -----	14	--	13
Can be washed at home-----	14	--	--
Little or no ironing, wash and drip dry-----	12	--	27
Inexpensive, economical-----	12	--	--
Looks dressy, rich, expensive-----	--	20	--
Performance, not linty, doesn't shed, doesn't wrinkle-----	--	14	16
Soil resistant, doesn't show dirt-----	--	14	--
Dries quickly-----	--	--	30
Number preferring the fiber-----	2,318	74	56

1/ Reasons shown are those mentioned by 10 percent or more of the homemakers preferring the indicated fiber.

2/ Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple answers.

Table 8.--Ownership of and preference for blankets, by type of blanket and fiber

Fiber	Ownership 1/		Preference <u>Percent</u>
	Regular <u>Percent</u>	Electric <u>Percent</u>	
Wool-----	47	44	42
Wool and rayon-----	5	7	3
Wool and nylon-----	4	6	5
Other wool mixtures-----	3	7	4
Cotton-----	13	9	15
Cotton and wool-----	15	5	13
Cotton and synthetics-----	3	2	3
Cotton and rayon-----	2	4	1
Other cotton mixtures-----	2/ *	1	*
Nylon-----	1	2	4
Other fibers and mixtures-----	4	4	6
Fiber unspecified-----	3	9	4
Number of owners-----	2,331	215	2,141

1/ Last blanket acquired.

2/ Asterisk denotes less than 1 percent.

Table 9.--Major reasons for fiber preference for regular blankets, for selected fibers 1/

Reasons	Wool Per- cent <u>2/</u>	Cotton Per- cent <u>2/</u>	Wool and nylon Per- cent <u>2/</u>	Cotton and wool Per- cent <u>2/</u>	Nylon Per- cent <u>2/</u>
Warmth -----	64	17	41	31	25
Durable, wears well -----	32	--	21	14	13
Lightweight, not too heavy --	18	15	26	12	33
Warmth without weight -----	11	--	--	--	--
Doesn't scratch, irritate skin; nonallergic -----	--	29	--	23	10
Holds shape, doesn't stretch, shrink -----	--	--	24	14	21
Less expensive, right price -	--	19	--	12	--
Easily washed, easy to clean	--	22	15	10	18
Soft, feels soft -----	--	13	10	--	10
Washes well, looks well after laundering -----	--	--	10	--	15
Dries quickly -----	--	--	10	--	14
Washable, no dry cleaning required -----	--	10	--	--	--
Not linty, fuzz doesn't come off -----	--	--	--	--	11
Looks nice, pretty, beautiful	--	--	--	--	10
Number preferring fiber -	894	315	102	284	91

1/ Reasons shown are those mentioned by 10 percent or more of the home-makers preferring the indicated fiber.

2/ Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple answers.

Table 10.--Ownership of table coverings, by type of covering and fiber

Fiber	All types <u>Per-</u> <u>cent</u> 2/	Regular full size <u>Per-</u> <u>cent</u> 2/	Luncheon sets <u>Per-</u> <u>cent</u> 2/	Place mats <u>Per-</u> <u>cent</u> 2/
Cotton-----	84	70	82	37
Cotton and rayon-----	12	11	6	2
Other cotton mixtures-----	3	2	1	2
Linen-----	50	49	37	19
Plastic-----	31	12	6	56
Rayon-----	9	7	6	.1
Straw, bamboo, grass-----	4	--	2/ * 13	
Oilcloth-----	4	4	*	*
Lace and crochet-----	3	3	*	.1
Other fibers-----	2	1	1	3
Other mixtures-----	1	1	1	.1
Other materials-----	1	--	*	3
Fiber unspecified-----	2	1	*	2
Number of users-----	2,467	2,232	1,437	818

1/ Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple answers.

2/ Asterisk denotes less than 1 percent.

